

## CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Although built in 1929, Calvary Baptist Church is significant for several reasons. It is the second church on these grounds, the first having been a frame building constructed in 1892. The congregation using this building has been meeting in Towson since 1890.

The building is important as a visual link to that time when the Courthouse and the square around it dominated the town, and not even a church steeple would vie with the gilded Courthouse dome for prominence. Architecturally the building is important as a fine example of church architecture, having been constructed of local Baltimore County stone.

## MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

BA - 1430

MAGI-0314304808

## INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Calvary Baptist Church

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

108 West Pennsylvania Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Towson

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Ninth

STATE

Maryland

COUNTY

Baltimore

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

## CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

## OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

## PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

## STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS

## ACCESSIBLE

☐ YES: RESTRICTED☒ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

## PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☐ PARK☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☒ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Calvary Baptist Church

Telephone #: 823-5282

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Pennsylvania and Baltimore Avenues

CITY, TOWN

Towson

VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code

Maryland 21204

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

Land Records Office

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Baltimore County

Liber #: 1392

Folio #: 501

STREET &amp; NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Towson

STATE

Maryland 21204

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

**7 DESCRIPTION****CONDITION**☒ EXCELLENT☐ GOOD☐ FAIR☐ DETERIORATED☐ RUINS☐ UNEXPOSED**CHECK ONE**☒ UNALTERED☐ ALTERED**CHECK ONE**☒ ORIGINAL SITE☐ MOVEDDATE Jan, 1978**DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE**

This is a small stone church built on the plan of a Latin cross in the late Gothic Revival style, with distinct English characteristics. The church occupies the northeast corner of the intersection of West Pennsylvania and Baltimore Avenues, facing the north side of Court House Square in the center of Towson.

The Structure has a longitudinal axis so the south facade where the main entry is located is actually a gable end facing the street. The building is one story, although because it sits on a slight mound, and has a roof with a very steep pitch, it appears to be higher.. Essentially the church is one huge high walled space with the floor plan of a cross, with a tall projecting tower built into the south facade.

The south facade is symetrically divided into three (3) bays, the middle bay being the bell tower which projects approximately two feet from the wall and contains the entry doors at the base. A pointed arch contains the doors, which are richly paneled and are themselves pointed. Directly above the doorway is a large pointed arch window, divided by wooden mullions into four sections. On the interior, this southern window echoes the space created by the baptistery at the north end of the church. Continuing on the exterior, the tower rises above this window, above the peak of the gable, and ends at the belfry. All four sides of the belfry are opened by two pointed arch openings. The extreme top of the tower is crenelated. The entire tower is supported by diagonal buttresses, which protrude approximately thirty inches from the tower at the base, and less as they rise vertically.

The two bays flanking the tower each contain two windows, one located above the other. The lowest is a narrow vertical rectangle, above which is a pointed arch which echoes the large central window in the tower.

Two entrances are attached to the east and west sides, and are visible from the south. At the west is a low projecting gabled entrance with stairs leading up and directly into the narthex or vestibule at the rear of the church. Attached at the east side is a turret which reaches almost to the roofline of the wall. This contains a spiral staircase which has a landing at the narthex and continues on to the balcony. Both the entryways are visually a part of the composition of the south facade, although structurally they are part of the east and west facades.

The west side, along Baltimore Avenue, is seven bays long. Proceeding from the south end, there is the gabled entryway, then four pointed arch windows which lead up to the crossing where the gabled transept projects at a ninety degree angle from the wall. Finally, at the north end is a one story ministers' study, nestled in between the transept and the end of the building. The study is entered through a large pointed arch opening, containing double doors. The study has a flat roof, and the top of the wall is crenelated. A single rectangular window is located to the right of the door.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

The east side is like the west side, except in back of the transept, the new Sunday School addition (the Harrison Rider Memorial wing) was tied into the body of the church in 1960. This is a two story structure, five bays wide and two bays deep, joined to the older portion of the church at a ninety degree angle. It has exterior entrances on the south, east, and north sides. On the north side, the addition projects out half of its width beyond the rear or north side of the old church. This north facade is a large gable end with five small rectangular windows, and a projecting chimney that rises through the peak of the gable.

Both the east and west sides of the church are buttressed between the four windows. The buttresses rise approximately two-thirds of the distance to the top of the walls. A stone water table runs continuously along the sides, as does a row of large projecting modillions, below the fascia.

The entire building is constructed of coursed "Loch Raven stone" which is quarried locally in Baltimore County. The stone is set in mortar, leaving a joint of about one inch visible. The corners are quoined with larger stones, but are not deliberately emphasized. Extensive use is made of limestone for coping and trim around windows and doors. The roof is dark grey slate, and is probably original.

On the east and west sides of the roof (which runs north-south) three small gabled dormers admit light to the ceiling area of the church. Their trim is painted a beige color, as is all the rest of the exterior wood, such as the extensive tracery in the windows. All the doors to the church are a rich weathered brown which shows the grain of the wood. Intricate paneling and tracery characterize all the exterior doors, in keeping with the Gothic style.

The church sits above street level, and on the west side, the grade level is halfway up the basement wall, as determined by the cofferdams around the basement windows. On the east side, the grade is lower, allowing the basement windows to be fully revealed. The ground immediately east of the church forms a courtyard, containing walkways to the Harrison Rider Wing. This courtyard is cleverly separated from the activity at street level by a serpentine brick wall, added in 1960.

Since the church sits above street level, one approaches the main entry via steps. Until 1967, there was a straight stairway leading directly to the doorway. However, Baltimore County claimed a right-of-way in front of the church, so the stairway was changed to a flanking approach. One now approaches the south facade from steps in an east-west orientation. This is the only exterior change since 1929, except of course where the 1960 wing was added to the church.

Entering the church through the south facade, one proceeds to a small vestibule or narthex at the rear of the church. Three sets of doors, repeating the tripartite division of the exterior, open from the narthex onto the main body of the church. Directly over the narthex is a balcony which is reached via the spiral staircase in the turret on the east wall. The Balcony extends approximately three feet beyond the the narthex over the doors by means of projecting wooden boxes supported by ornate wooden brackets.

## Item #7 Description...continued-2

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The main portion of the church is one large hall approximately thirty-five feet wide and seventy feet long. It is one aisle wide and is covered by a roof with an open ceiling. There are two rows of pews separated by a central aisle leading to the pulpit. These pews are said to be over one hundred years old, having come from the old Franklin Square Baptist Church in Baltimore City. They are reported to be made of solid native Maryland Chestnut. On the exterior side walls, the main body of the church is denoted by the four pointed arch windows.

Proceeding north towards the sanctuary, the transepts create additional space in which pews are located, as well as an organ and seating space for a choir. Each transept has a large pointed arch window, which is subdivided by mullions into four lancet windows.

The north wall of the church reflects the tri-partite division inherent in Gothic Church design. The raised pulpit is reached by three steps behind which the center portion of the wall is opened by a large pointed arch. The Baptistry is recessed in this arch, and behind and rising above it is yet another pointed arch with wooden tracery that subdivides the top portion of the arch into seven parts. However, the Baptistry is the dominant element of the sanctuary. It is a space created by partitioning off the front of a niche in the north wall. The wall is painted dark blue trimmed with gold stars, and this forms the backdrop for the pulpit. It gives the impression of a mysterious void, and the viewers' eye cannot help but be drawn to it.

Flanking the central arch are two smaller pointed arches. On the west side are doors to the minister's study and on the east is space for additional seating. Originally, the wall space above the doors on the west side was blank, and the east side contained the pipes for the organ, thus giving an unbalanced appearance. In 1960 this was changed and both the east and west sides of the wall above the arches was enclosed, thereby balancing the appearance of the sanctuary. The organ pipes now appear at floor level.

The most dominating structural aspect of the interior is the set of five roof trusses which support the roof and are fully exposed. The truss design is based on English Gothic church construction, an element which sets English churches apart from all others. These Trusses are of solid red oak, with rafters being eight inches by ten inches, the struts are eight inches square, and the purlins eight inches by six. There may be mortise and tenon joints used to fasten these timbers, but since bolts and fastening plates are visible, this is probably the way they are joined. The trusses extend to the top of the plate, and are extended down the face of the wall to a projecting stone corbel approximately seven feet above floor level.

The interior walls of the church are finished with rough textured plaster painted a soft yellow. All the wood is finished in deep brown tones. The contrast is dulled by the diffused light coming in through the windows which have panes of opaque glass. The overall effect is that of a quiet serene space, separate and apart from the busy streets outside.

Wood is used generously inside the church, apart from the impressive ceiling trusses. All the windows are set into the stone walls in wooden frames, and each window is subdivided by wooden

## Item #7 Description...continued-3

mullions into two or more lancet windows. A 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " chair rail runs around the perimeter of the nave, approximately four feet from the floor.

Only a few of the windows are of stained glass, the majority being small narrow rectangular panes of yellow--grey opaque glass. As mentioned, the play of the light in the interior is vital since it defines the mood of the space. Ten electric lamps, five per side, hang from the roof trusses for use as necessary. They are polygonal glass shades with Gothic tracery metal frames.

The architectural plans for the church building are kept in the church archives. They are dated July 1926 and were drawn by the Baltimore architectural firm Owens & Sisco. Originally when the new stone church was to be built in 1929, the old wood frame church was to be moved to where the Harrison Rider wing now stands to be used as office and classroom space. However, this early attempt at adaptive re-use was spoiled when the wood church burned in 1929 during the course of construction.

Also contained in the archives is a proposal and drawing of an extension of the 1960 wing, originally scheduled for completion in 1965. This wing would have run parallel to the stone church back toward Pennsylvania Avenue, and its completion would have resulted in a set of connected buildings somewhat reminiscent of an English academic village. This planned expansion would have done away with the Italianate Church House, but now due to rising costs, it seems unlikely that it will be carried out.

## 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES Built 1929--1930

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Owens and Sisco  
Baltimore, Md.

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The late Gothic Revival style chosen for Calvary Baptist Church is particularly appropriate for a building located in a relatively rural area. The church presents a very dignified facade and has an air of solid permanence, perhaps subtly reinforced by the looming buttressed and crenellated tower through which one enters. Stone is the ideal building material in this situation, and here the church walls are of solid local "Loch Raven" stone from Baltimore County. The stone was supplied by the local firm of Harry T. Campbell. The 1960 addition uses the same type of stone, but it is merely a facing over a concrete block walls. Thus the solid stone walls of the church represent a way of construction that has faded away due to rising labor and material costs. It is a testament to the dying art of the stone mason.

This corner has particular significance for Towson Baptists. In 1892, shortly after Calvary Baptist was formally organized, a wood frame Victorian Gothic church was built where the Italianate style Church House now stands. Since 1892, this corner has been the place of worship for Towson Baptists, and it continues to serve a large and stable congregation.

Calvary Baptist Church is carefully integrated into the streetscape that borders the Towson Court House. The building is actually raised half a story from the street level, and the peak of the roof is quite high. But it is carefully restrained on its site, never trying to compete for attention with the gilded dome of the Court House. This would indicate that the architects even as late as 1929 were still carefully trying to preserve the nineteenth century scale of Towson as a courthouse town. This is difficult to visualize with today's streetscape since skyscraper like buildings literally surround the Court House square. However, there is still some of the nineteenth century flavor left in buildings such as the First National Bank at 405 Washington Avenue, and the residential blocks (200 West Pennsylvania and Chesapeake) and of course Calvary Baptist Church.

In this vein, it is also interesting to compare the scale of Calvary Baptist Church to Trinity Episcopal Church, one block north, and the Catholic Church two blocks north. As one moves in a northerly direction from the Court House, there is a pronounced emphasis on the verticality of the churches. Since these two churches are not a part

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY



of Court House square, they are allowed to rise up. Calvary Baptist pays quiet homage to the center of government by sitting firmly anchored on its corner plot, never awing people with dizzying exterior verticality.

An excellent example of late Gothic Revival architecture, a handsome display of local stone, and masterpiece of stone masonry, all with a scale that harkens back to Towson's earlier more rural days, these are indeed the elements that make Calvary Baptist Church a significant architectural landmark.



**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Towson Under God by Kingsley Smith. 1976 pub. by Baltimore  
County Public Library

"An Historical Sketch of the Calvary Baptist Church"

Claris I. Crane, edited by Leland Higginbotham. Published by the  
CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY church

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION \_\_\_\_\_

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE

COUNTY

STATE

COUNTY

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Phillip R. Lord

volunteer

WAYNE L. NIELD, II  
HISTORIC TOWSON, INC.

ORGANIZATION

Historic Towson Inc.

DATE

February 1978

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Towson

STATE

Maryland 21204

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust  
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 267-1438

Title Search for Calvary Baptist Church

BA-1430

Liber 1392 Folio 501

June 29, 1945 by and between Frank A. and Evelyn A. Kaufman  
trustees of the Calvary Baptist Church

Beginning for the first in the line of the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue at a point distant 232' westerly from the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Washington Street which said point is 1322' in a westerly direction from the southwest corner of the lot heretofore conveyed by one Washington Townsend and his wife to Hohn T. Ensor by deed dated July 25, 1863 in Liber 38, Folio 282 and running thence along the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue in a westerly direction or course 50' thence northerly parallel with Washington Street 150' to a 20' alley thence along the south side of said alley and parallel to Pennsylvania Avenue in an easterly direction 50' to a point distant 232' in a westerly direction from the southwest corner formed by the intersection of said 20' alley and Washington Street aforesaid and thence southerly in a straight line parallel with Washington Street 150' to beginning.

Beginning for the second thereof on the north side of Pennsylvania Avenue at the distance of 156' east from the intersection of said north side of said avenue and the east side of Baltimore Avenue and running thence easterly on the north side of said Pennsylvania Avenue 50' to the lot formerly owned by William S. Keech and now the lot firstly described herein thence northerly along the west side of said lot 150' to an alley 20' wide thence westerly 51' more or less along the south side of said alley and thence southwardly 150' to beginning.

Improvements on said two above described lots being known as No. 108 W. Pennsylvania Avenue and also known as the Osborne I. Yellott property.

Granted and conveyed by Betty Powers Greene and Joseph H. Greene unto Frank A. Kaufman

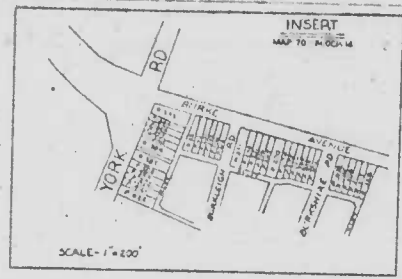
July 25, 1863 Liber GHC 38 Folio 282  
grantor-Washington and Elizabeth Townsend  
grantee-John T. Ensor

Liber 34, Folio 277 March 24, 1862  
grantor-Enos Smedley and Hannah H. Smedley  
grantee-Washington Townsend  
Tracts of land called James' Meadows, Gunner's Range, & Isolto Hope

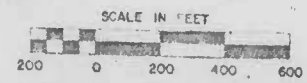
April 5, 1825 conveyed by Samuel J. Donaldson and Abraham Yost trustees to Doctor Grafton Marsh as Trustee to Doctor Joseph Marhs by deed dated April 8, 1830

NOTE: Originally, the Italianate style residence, today the Church House, stood at the corner where the stone church stands today. In 1929, when the church was built, the Italianate house was moved to its present location, which is approximately where the frame church of 1892 stood.

BA-1430



TOWSON  
SCALE 1" = 200'



DEPT. OF ASSESSMENTS & TAXATION  
TAX MAP DIVISION  
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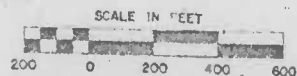
MAP NO.  
70A

Calvary Baptist  
Church

BA-1430



TOWSON  
SCALE 1"=200'



DEPT. OF ASSESSMENTS & TAXATION  
TAX MAP DIVISION  
TOWSON, MARYLAND  
AUGUST 1967  
MAP NO. 70A

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WD DEPT. OF ASSESS & TAX



BA-1430

CALVARY BAPTIST CH.  
E.

W. NIELD  
1/78





BA- 1430

CALVARY BAPTIST CH.  
S.

W. NIELD  
1/78